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SUBJECT: JEWISH COMMUNITY DISCUSSES ARMENIA, ANTI-SEMITISM
AND FETHULLAH GULEN

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[B](#). 08 ANKARA 24
[C](#). 07 ANKARA 2193

Classified By: Deputy Principal Officer Sandra S. Oudkirk for reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The leadership of the Jewish Community of Turkey (JCT) at the Chief Rabbinate of Istanbul shared with us on July 14 their positive perceptions of a visit earlier this month by representatives of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to address the ADL's position on the Armenian Genocide Resolution (AGR). We also discussed rising anti-Semitism and the Community's "beneficial" 12-year relationship with the Gulen movement. End Summary.

The Jews in Turkey

[1](#)2. (U) We met July 14 with JCT (Musevi Cemaati) President Sylvyo Olvadya and two vice presidents, Lina Filiba and Sami Herman, to discuss JCT concerns, as one of several foundations with administrative responsibilities for the property and finances of the Chief Rabbinate and other properties. Lausanne Treaty recognition provides the Rabbinate with certain benefits from the government, including the provision of electricity without charge in synagogues. However, lacking a legal personality under the Foundations law, the Rabbinate is unable to own land, open bank accounts, or request work permits for foreign workers; title to the Rabbinate and other synagogues is held in the name of supporting foundations that do have legal personality

Recent ADL Visit Smoothed Ruffled Feathers

[1](#)3. (C) Shortly after ADL reversed its position in August 2007 and, for the first time, referred to the 1915 massacre of Armenians as "genocide", ADL President Abe Foxman proposed visiting Turkey to smooth ruffled feathers. While ADL continued to oppose the AGR out of concern for Turkey's Jews, the use of "genocide" was very controversial, adding to the delicacy of the Community's position (refs A,B). The JCT publicly denied that the Community's welfare would be impacted by the AGR (for political reasons), but Filiba privately acknowledged the potential. After waiting a year, as recommended by Community leaders, Foxman met in July 2008 with the Prime Minister and Ministers of the Interior, Education, and Religious Affairs. JCT officials advised us that they were impressed and comforted by Foxman's report on the results of these visits.

14. (C) Much of the JCT's concern about last year's ADL reversal stemmed from the public perception in Turkey that all of Judaism speaks with one voice. The leadership present at our meeting was quick to note that although this clearly is not the case, this is the perception with which they must contend. In a statement last August to the Israeli press, Ambassador Namik Tan, ambassador to Israel and a close confidant of President Gul, acknowledged that the Turkish public perceives all Jews, regardless of citizenship, to be of one voice. Filiba assured us that the JCT is confident that Tan knows that the different Jewish entities have different standpoints on the Armenian tragedy.

Post-July 9th Security Strategy

15. (C) Noting the July 9 attack on Consulate Istanbul, JCT officials told us that they enjoy good relationships with the local police in the neighborhoods of their various synagogues. City police, privately contracted security guards, and hi-tech security systems protect the Community and the property it uses, and account for more than 50 percent of its budget. Herman notes that this level of expenditure is typical for most Jewish communities throughout Europe and was at this level even prior to the fatal 2003 bombings of two

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Istanbul synagogues. Filiba stressed the importance of forming and maintaining personal relationships with members of the security forces, even though the process must be an on-going one as new officers gain responsibilities that impact the community.

Deepening Anti-Semitism

16. (C) The JCT leadership acknowledged that after the 2003 bombings they have become acutely aware that they are a target of terrorism. Although some Turkish politicians likewise acknowledge the threat to the community, they do not seem willing to counter the misinformation that contributes to this threat. Filiba recalled that Foreign Minister Babacan said that if Congress had passed the AGR, the GOT would not have felt responsible for controlling the reaction of Turkish Muslims against Turkish Jews. Although they don't feel anti-Semitism emanating from the GOT, Filiba also expressed concern about an alarming increase in individual anti-Semitism, especially in the younger generation. Filiba listed as contributing factors to the "disturbing" increase in anti-Semitism:

- "Inadvertent" anti-Semitic comments made in the public sphere by city-level politicians,
- Pop culture influence on youth (Ref B), such as anti-Semitic movies and TV series like "Kurtler Vadisi", the movie version of which featured harvesting of human organs in Iraq by the U.S. for the Israeli market, and books such as "Efendi," by Soner Yalcin of CNN Turk, describing members of the "Muslim" secular elite in Turkey as secret Jews.
- Never-ending conspiracy theories linking Israel to prominent cases like the Hrant Dink murder trial,
- The Istanbul Chief Prosecutor's recent statement implicating a former Gulenist, now a Rabbi in Canada, in the alleged Ergenekon crime network.

Close Ties to Gulen, but Not in Public Please

17. (C) Since Necmettin Erbakan's election as Prime Minister in 1996, according to Olvadya, the JCT has enjoyed good relations with the Fetullah Gulen movement through the Gulen affiliate Writers and Journalists Foundation (WJF). With the WJF's help, the JCT engages in dialogue with journalists who have adopted an anti-Semitic slant in their articles. At a lunch held every two months, the JCT meets with the WJF, headed by Gulen as honorary president, to continue their dialogue and to plan an annual Iftar dinner.

18. (C) JCT leaders told us that WJF asked the JCT in 2004? to attest to Fettullah Gulen's character in support of his application for permanent US residency. By passing its letter of support to Consular Affairs via the US Consulate in Istanbul, rather than providing the letter to WJF, JCT avoided being listed as a Gulen supporter in Turkish media coverage of Gulen's acquittal in June by a Turkish court on charges of anti-secularist activities and his failure to obtain US residency. Mainstream Turkish media gave prominent play to former Ambassador to Turkey Morton Abramowitz and other US politicians and citizens who had provided letters of support for Gulen.

19. (C) (U) Comment: The JCT has well-placed allies and strong optimism in their struggle to educate the Turkish population on the perspectives and concerns of Turkey's 20,000 Jews. Given the backlash to the ADL change of position, and the ongoing Turkish suspicion of subversive activity, the JCT knows it must be prudent when interacting with political and social organizations - even those, such as the Gulen Movement, aimed at promoting inter-faith dialog.
End Comment.
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